

Interview with Leona Butler

March 2, 2011

Conducted in the Butler home, Offerle, Kansas

Interviewers: Joan Weaver and Rosetta Graff, Kinsley Library

Also present: Scott Butler, son

Doris Rutledge, daughter

Joan: Can you give us your full name?

Leona: Mary Leona Butler

Joan: Where do you currently reside?

Leona: 422 South Elm, Offerle, Kansas.

Joan: When and where were you born?

Leona: In Offerle, Kansas, in March 21, 1925.

Joan: What were the names of your parents?

Leona: Pearl Jennings Erickson and Lloyd Herman Erickson.

Joan: And the names of your grandparents? Both sides.

Leona: Lawrence Erickson and Mary Erickson and Joe Jennings and Ewing. They lived in Winfield.

Joan: What was your household like that you grew up in? Did you have brothers and sisters?

Leona: No.

Joan: So you were an only child. And this was in Winfield?

Leona: No, it was here.

Joan: What brought your parents or your grandparents to this area?

Leona: Well, my father was born here. He worked here.

Joan: What brought his parents here?

Leona: Well, they lived north of Kinsley, farmed north of Kinsley. Then my grandfather, I guess he bought out the lumberyard here in Offerle. So then they moved here to Offerle.

Joan: So your grandparents, was this the Ericksons? Yes. They were farmers north of Kinsley. What brought them to Kinsley, do you know? Did their parents farm?

Leona: Their parents brought them here.

Joan: Okay, so we've been in the county for a long time, the family has.

Leona: Yes.

Joan: And then your mother's family?

Leona: My mother came to Offerle to teach school. Then she met my father and they were married.

Joan: You were born in 1925, so you have some memories of the World War II era.

Leona: A few.

Joan: Do you remember Pearl Harbor? Where you were and what you were doing when it happened?

Leona: I can't remember where I was, I was in this area.

Joan: It was a Sunday.

Leona: Oh! Well, I was at church and we were having a Sunday youth group Bible class, and we heard about it.

Joan: You were an only child, so you didn't have any brothers that would have fought, and your father wasn't drafted.

Leona: My father was a polio victim and he walked with a crutch and a cane.

Joan: That exempted him from service. Do you remember the trains coming through with the soldiers on them? We've had other people tell us stories about that.

Leona: Well, I remember the boy that worked for my father. He enlisted in the service, and we went to meet the train when he left.

Joan: And your father had the lumberyard at this time?

Leona: No, that was my grandfather.

Joan: What did your father do then?

Leona: He was a farmer.

Joan: He was a farmer, and raised?

Leona: Wheat, milo...

Joan: And animals?

Leona: Not at that time, it was later when he had animals.

Joan: When you were home was he raising animals?

Leona: We had cows.

Joan: So it started when you were small. So growing up, what was it like? Did you have chores?

Leona: Oh, not too many. In the summertime, I drove a truck and hauled wheat and helped my father when I could. He went out and ran the tractor and he did lots of things with his crutch and cane, but he finally got so he'd give up and he hauled... My mother, she helped a lot. She would dump the trucks. We had bins west of our house, and she would go out there and dump the trucks and help him put it in the bins if he didn't go to the elevator.

Joan: And you went to school here in Offerle? What was that like? How big was your class?

Leona: Well, it wasn't too big. In my graduating class, there were seven of us. There were about 40 in my high school. I walked across the street with my dinner every day and went to school. But when I rained, they would usually take me in.

Joan: Do you remember anything in particular about the school? What year did you graduate from high school?

Leona: I graduated in '42.

Joan: So right at the beginning of the war was when you graduated. You had seven in your class. Did some of those young men go out to the service?

Leona: I think so, about four of them. There were four boys and three girls in that class. I think all of them, the boys, went to service.

Joan: Your husband is here too. When did that all get started?

Leona: What do you mean?

Joan: Dating or whatever...

Leona: Well, I don't remember that!

Joan: He was here, right, so you knew him all the time growing up. You knew him, but you weren't dating him in high school or anything like that.

Leona: Yes.

Joan: So you went to college then after high school. Where did you attend college?

Leona: Emporia State.

Joan: And your major was?

Leona: Commerce.

Joan: And with education too?

Leona: Commerce and education. I had to go to school a couple of summers to get my degree. I graduated with a B.S. in Commerce; then I had to go back and get my education.

Joan: Commerce would be your business classes, what made you decide to become a teacher and not just go to work in a business?

Leona: I didn't know what I wanted to do. I graduated and I came home and I was here. And the superintendent of the school here came over and asked me to teach. And that was it.

Joan: What kind of classes were in Commerce? What was that?

Leona: Typing, bookkeeping...

Joan: Shorthand?

Leona: No shorthand. There was Business Law.

Joan: Was this a four year program? Yes, because you said you had a B.S?

Leona: Yes,

Joan: So you had all the basic classes too. And you were going to college during the war. Did that affect your college education of life?

Leona: No, except I was living in a dorm, and they made us move out of the dorm so the soldiers could have a place to live. So we had to find homes.

Joan: Was there an army base there then? Or why?

Leona: I think they sent them to go to college.

Joan: For classes. And the girls got kicked out of the dorm. Now that's interesting. So where did you live then?

Leona: I lived in a private home.

Joan: You rented a room?

Leona: Yes. I had an aunt (*Forrest Erickson Williams*) that was teaching in the college, and she had an apartment. The first year I was there, I lived with her, and then I moved into the dorm. Then after that I moved into a private home.

Joan: Was it a room or an apartment in the private home.

Leona: It was just a room.

Joan: With kitchen privileges?

Leona: No, so I had to go out and eat every day.

Joan: So you didn't eat at the college? You had to eat at restaurants and things.

Leona: Mostly.

Joan: Well, that's different.

Leona: Well, I worked in a café there in college, for awhile and ate there.

Joan: How did you get back and forth to Emporia?

Leona: Train.

Joan: About that time there would have been a lot of soldiers on the train going to school there.

Leona: No, I usually had to travel at night, there weren't too many soldiers then.

Joan: How long did it take to go to Emporia then?

Leona: Three hours, three or four hours.

Joan: Did you make a lot of stops?

Leona: We went from Emporia to Newton, and then from Newton to Hutchinson, and then on here.

Joan: And it stopped at Kinsley? Or did it come right here?

Leona: It came here.

Joan: It stopped here too. Well that's interesting. That's something we've never heard before. We haven't interviewed many people about college life.

Rosetta: And there were mainly young girls in college? There weren't very many men.

Leona: That's true.

Joan: What about extra activities. Was there band or chorus?

Leona: I did sing in chorus, but there weren't too many activities, really.

Joan: Many of those were curtailed during the war. Things were...

Leona: Well, I took piano lessons when I was in college.

Joan: Had you had piano before?

Leona: Yes.

Joan: You had the piano in your home and your parents gave you lessons, were able to pay for lessons?

Leona: Yes.

Joan: We've found that to be quite typical too. Music was important.

Leona: My mother played, but she didn't give me lessons.

Doris: Who gave you lessons?

Leona: Mrs. Edwards. Josephine Edwards.

Doris: I thought she was Mrs. Boyd.

Leona: Well, she married Mr. Boyd later.

Joan: And you said you were a member of the Methodist Church.

Leona: Well, it was the E.U.B. (*at that time*)

Joan: The Evangelical United Brethren is my guess.

Leona: And then eventually we joined the Methodist Church.

Joan: So how many churches were there in Offerle at that time?

Leona: Well, in Offerle, there was just the Methodist Church and the Catholic Church, and then there was the Lutheran Church out in the country.

Joan: And the Methodist Church before that had been E.U.B.?

Leona: Yes.

Joan: So it was just the one building. It just changed names.

Leona: Yes, it just changed names.

Joan: When was that? Did it happen before your time or after?

Leona: Oh no, it changed the names...

Joan: What brought about that, do you know?

Leona: No. It just happened.

Doris: They decided that the E.U.B. was getting too small, or something.

Joan: I was wondering, it would be interesting to figure out what went on in that time period. Having belonged to churches all my life, I know that those things can cause a little tension when you change things.

Scott: Did you play for the theater when it was here?

Leona: Not for the theater, no.

Scott: Grandma did.

Joan: Did your grandmother play for the Palace Theater?

Leona: No, we had a theater here in town, and my folks had a grocery store and a theater. Mom would play the piano.

Joan: For the silent movies? Did you get to hear her? Or was that before your time?

Leona: Oh yes. I was down there a lot. And then when she was playing, I would stay out there where my dad was. I would walk on the watermelons.

Joan: Like stepping stones? This was your mother? What was her name again?

Leona: Pearl.

Joan: Where was the theater?

Leona: Well, the building is gone now, but it was right south of the lumberyard up here. It was a big brick building.

Joan: And half of it was theater and half of it was grocery store. Do you know the name of the grocery store?

Leona: I don't think I ever heard it. (*Erickson Grocery Store*)

Scott: Was it Coat's store?

Leona: No, that was later. My dad had this grocery store, and then I guess he sold out. Basgall probably bought him out.

Joan: Was theirs on the other side of the street? Basgalls?

Leona: It was right south, where the bank is, it was right south of the bank.

Doris: Where that building was, for a long time, it was St. Joseph's Parish Hall or a recreation Hall or something. I don't know how soon after, that's what I was asking.

Joan: It went from being the theater and grocery store to being the parish hall? Is that what you said?

Leona: Well, sometime later.

Joan: Well, that's interesting. And this was a regular theater, sort of like the Palace, only small.

Leona: I guess so, I don't know. It was a long time ago.

Joan: That's why we do these interviews. So your dad had a grocery store too, you said. Did you work in the grocery store? Or was that before you were old enough?

Leona: Before. I tried to walk on watermelons.

Joan: That's so cute. Let's see. We were talking about the church. So about how big was the church before you went off to college?

Leona: Maybe 50. The Sunday School classes were big enough they had to divide the group up in the church. Three services every week: Sunday morning, evening and Wednesday night.

Joan: Do you remember any other activities at the church? Was there social life also at the church besides church? Dinners or ice cream socials?

Leona: Yes, dinners and ice cream socials.

Joan: You said you had a youth group, or a youth Bible study.

Leona: Yes.

Joan: Okay, so we've got you through college, and we've got you back home here and the superintendent gives you a job. And somewhere in here, you're going to decide to marry your husband. How did that happen? Let's hear about that romance and all.

Leona: I remember that. I usually went to church on Sunday evening. And he came in one night and wanted to know if I would go to a movie with him. Well, I said I usually go to church, but I'll go to the movie with you. Well, we started. I don't know how long...we were married in '49.

Joan: When did you graduate from college? We didn't establish that.

Leona: '46 probably. I think it was in '46. Then we were married in June of '49. I still taught a couple years.

Joan: And you were teaching here?

Leona: Yes. I taught a year in Bucklin. And I taught six months in Lewis.

Joan: And then Doris was born in '54. And then after that, were you a housewife during those child-bearing years?

Leona: I mostly stayed home and helped Maynard farm.

Joan: Farmwife. There's a difference, housewife and farmwife. Helping run the farm.

Rosetta: Where was the farm at?

Leona: Around here.

Rosetta: Just around the house here.

Doris: My father had land in Ford County, around Bellefont. I think during the early years, he just farmed up there. My grandfather was still alive, and still farmed here.

Leona: And my father actually bought a section of ground north of Garden City. We had to move out there. We couldn't stay out there all the time, but we'd move out there. In the fall, we'd go out there and work the ground. Then we'd go out there during harvest.

Joan: What did you live in when you were out there?

Leona: In a shack with an outhouse, and a shower. We had a big barrel up on top for a shower and the water would warm up during the day, and we'd take showers at night.

Joan: Seems to me that quite a few people did that, ended up getting land out west and farming both places. Do you remember why? Was the land cheap or...?

Leona: I don't know why he bought it. I think he just needed more land. We had a family, and around here, he and his brother had to try to farm together. You know, two families with all their children, were trying to live here. I don't know why he bought out there, except I suppose the land was cheap and it was available.

Joan: Did you take the implements back and forth?

Leona: Yes, we did.

Joan: That must have been a long trip.

Leona: Yes, it was a dangerous trip to load up the implements on trailers, you know, and carry them. We did it.

Joan: Did you do all your harvesting yourself? Or did you hire a custom cutter?

Leona: We just cut it ourselves. Then he rented it out for awhile.

Joan: I assume you took the grain to elevators there?

Leona: There was an elevator at Tennis. It would be about five or six miles from there. (*North of Garden City*)

Joan: Okay, here and maybe there both was this dry land farming?

Leona: Yes.

Joan: Ever irrigated?

Leona: Not until...when did we start irrigating?

Scott: Probably about the late '60's. It started coming in the area anyway.

Joan: How did that change farming, when you added the water?

Leona: Well, we had better crops.

Joan: Do you know what the yields (realizing that every year is different) would be in a typical year before irrigating and then after?

Leona: I have no idea.

Joan: The other thing we're asking that you maybe don't know, about fertilizer or pesticides.

Leona: Well, I don't think we did too much of that until Scott started farming.

Joan: What year would you say.

Leona: He started when he was about 12. Or maybe 13. He wasn't too old when he first got into it. My husband wasn't too well, so Scott got into it.

Joan: And that's when you think the fertilizer...

Scott: It was here some before then, but yes, then it really came.

Joan: So, during the '50's and '60's, what was the business community like here in Offerle. What kind of stores did you have?

Leona: We had the lumberyard, and the post office and a little mortuary, called Sams. We had two grocery stores and a farm implement store, a pharmacy, café, a beer joint (I didn't go in there), and a barber shop and a creamery, a filling station. The co-op was not very active, but it was there. There were two grain elevators in town, the bank, the beauty shop.

Joan: So there was pretty much everything you needed to live here.

Leona: Yes. We did a lot of our grocery shopping here. If you needed something special you'd have to go to Kinsley or we went to Dodge some.

Rosetta: You talked about Oliphant's Retail Store.

Leona: They did mostly repairs and things like that. I don't think they sold too many implements really.

Scott: Weren't they the Case dealer?

Leona: Yes, maybe they were the Case dealer.

Scott: I think they sold tractors and farm equipment and all associated things with that.

Joan: Where were you living at this time, when you were first married?

Leona: We always lived in this house. Always. Well, we had had an apartment for six or seven weeks.

Joan: And the Ericksons. Where were they?

Leona: The Ericksons lived just a half a block from here.

Joan: Were there other houses, or was this part of a farm at that point?

Leona: No, there were houses.

Joan: So your farm was just at the edge of town. That's a different situation. You get to be a farm kid with being a farm kid. And your entertainment was... Did you still have a movie house at that time or was it gone?

Leona: No, it was gone. If you went to a movie, you went to Kinsley.

Joan: Did you have any other forms of entertainment?

Leona: We kids went skating.

Joan: Was that here, or in Kinsley?

Leona: That was in Lewis.

Joan: That was in Lewis! Okay, did you have dances ever?

Leona: They did, but my folks wouldn't let me go to dances. I don't know if they had dances or not, because I didn't go!

Joan: Not after you married?

Leona: No, we didn't have the money to go. We went to church and movies once in a while. *(Laughter)* My husband and I one night they had a movie and we decided we didn't want to go. We were racing to see who could get into bed first. We jumped in the bed at the same time and broke the bed!

Other Person: Did you go to Spearville sometimes on Saturdays?

Leona: No. Our doctor was in Spearville for a time. Doris was born in Spearville, and Larry (that died) was in Spearville. Scott and Wayne were born in Kinsley, when the hospital was closed. I think my father got repairs in Spearville, and then my husband.

Joan: Now when did the train stop coming here, the passenger train? It was still going on during the war.

Leona: It still stopped when people wanted it to stop. You know, they didn't just stop, just when people wanted it to.

Joan: When there was a flag up to stop or somebody on the train wanted to get off. So did you ever use the train in the '50's or '60's to go anywhere?

Doris: I rode the train when...I was in high school in the late '60's or early '70s's. I graduated in '72.

Joan: Doris says that she rode the train here, and she graduated in 1972, and they would let her off. That's pretty late, isn't it, to be able to do that, at least I'm thinking it would be. Did you know that? So you and your husband eventually took over and inherited the Erickson farm. Is that the same for

Bellefont? Did you inherit that? Or were there brothers and sisters there?

Leona: There were brothers and sisters.

Joan: They divided that up. Did your dad always farm? You said he had a grocery store, right?

Leona: He had a grocery store, and then he farmed.

Joan: He did both. Your husband just farmed.

Doris: I heard about the time during the Depression when her father had installed the oil heaters to make some extra money. They were switching, I'm not sure what they were switching to.

Leona: They were switching from coal to fuel oil.

Joan: I guess we didn't start that early. Do you remember anything about the Depression? You'd have been pretty young.

Leona: Oh, I don't remember too much about it. I think that's one reason my father bought that ground out at Garden City to make more income.

Joan: Oh, he bought it that early.

Leona: Yes, in '21, I think.

Joan: So it probably was very cheap.

Leona: I just remember, we had to be careful how we spent our money. We used the garden and had vegetables. We raised chickens.

Joan: Did a lot of canning then?

Leona: Yes.

Joan: Did your mother make your clothes?

Leona: Most of them.

Joan: Did you make her (Doris') clothes?

Leona: Most of the time, she didn't have anything except what I made for her.

Joan: So you remember, maybe not for her, but earlier, the feed sacks.

Leona: You know, we didn't use feed sacks. We used material.

Rosetta: So it was okay to have chickens penned in Offerle. Everybody did?

Leona: Yes, everybody did. We had our own water wells, didn't use city water.

Scott: Everybody had septic systems.

Leona: Yes, septic tanks.

Joan: Do you know when that changed? When they had city water come in and sewer?

Scott: The water was the middle to the late '50's, I think. We used the sewer and then the water, I'm not sure.

Joan: Well, you have to have the water first.

Doris: I'm kind of grey on that, but I remember.

Scott: That's when gaskets were coming in and water systems were coming in, sewer systems were used. Each house, everybody had their own well, they had that their own tank.

Joan: That's interesting, because here you are living in a town, yet it's taking you as long as people in the country.

Doris: She says she never remembers living without electricity.

Joan: How about telephone? Do you remember when that came in?

Leona: No. Always had a telephone that I can remember, the crank kind.

Joan: How about television. When did you get your first television?

Leona: Oh dear. We didn't have television until she (*Doris*) was getting pretty old.

Doris: Probably in '63.

Joan: Was that three channels or something like that?

Doris: If you were lucky. My grandfather, for some reason, didn't have any use for television. My great grandfather had television, he died. When my grandfather died, we kind of got television after that.

Rosetta: When you consolidated with Kinsley, can you tell us feelings on how that turned out?

Leona: I can't remember that there were any hard feelings. It's just one of those things that happened. Except Doris, I didn't like her having to go to Kinsley. Kinsley was a rough town, and I didn't like her having to go.

Joan: Okay, so it was in the middle of your school year that the consolidation started, Doris?

Doris: I was in the class, my 7th grade year, the year they consolidated. I think we were the first class from the 7th grade that graduated.

Joan: Do feel the people just thought this had to be done because the population wasn't here and there wasn't any alternative.

Leona: Yes, I don't remember there was very much dissension at all.

Joan: Was there any controversy at all about keeping it Kinsley/Offerle? Because that still seems to be hanging around.

Doris: I think so, but I don't remember to much about that.

Joan: As long as you're here, Doris, and you made the move okay?

Doris: Things that I remember, is that there were just so many kids! My class was 12, and then we were almost 60 or 70. I think that one was okay, but when I went to high school as a freshman, I think I had trouble adjusting that year.

Leona: The kids rode the bus to Kinsley.

Joan: Instead of walking across the street? Adjustments!

Doris: Although when I was in grade school, I wanted to ride the bus. And then in high school when I had to ride every day, then I didn't want to.

Scott: And there was a Catholic school here too.

Joan: How long was the Catholic school here? Did it go out before consolidation?

Scott: Yes. No! I guess I was in the 3rd or 4th grade, because I can remember the Catholic School closing, we had the Catholic kids coming to school.

Joan: Was there any consideration of townspeople to send their children to parochial school, instead of the public school, to keep them in town? Do you remember that?

Leona: No, because we always had public school.

Joan: I know, but with the consolidation. Rather than to send them to Kinsley, did anybody feel like maybe they'd rather send them to Catholic school?

Leona: I don't think so.

Scott: We'd always had a school here, even with consolidation. So it wasn't that. You could go to Catholic school, or you could go to Kinsley, that was not an option.

Joan: And this school was 8th grade?

Scott: At that time it was first through 8th.

Joan: So the high school would have been the same because the parochial school wasn't a high school. So everybody went to the public high school.

Doris: Well, I can't remember all of the stories, but Offerle school wasn't like Offerle high school or Offerle grade school. It was Offerle Normal School. In Julie's book, Offerle was the first (*Julie*

Ackerman, Offerle History 1876-1976).

Leona: Rural high school.

Rosetta: What was the difference between a rural high school and a regular one?

Joan: They didn't have plumbing or water!

Leona: I don't know. I just know Offerle had a high school.

Joan: Maybe it was the district, the taxing district for the school was the rural area and not just the city.

Doris: I don't know; it wasn't explained in Julie's book, I don't think, but it was the "first in the state" or the "only in the state" that was the Offerle Rural High School. I just never did know what made it, what distinguished that.

Leona: I don't know, I think it was just that there was an area...I remember about six miles east of Offerle.

Joan: So it was over into Ford County, no, she said east.

Scott (*who drives a school bus*): She's talking east. Because when they consolidated, it's part of our district now, you go almost to Bellefont. I think we stop a mile from there, and then you go south just about to Windhorst and then back around. You go north. Right now there are not kids out there. It's parts of Edwards County, Ford County, and Hodgeman County. I assume at that time was Offerle School District.

Joan: I was wondering if maybe that's where the name came in because it was crossing county lines in order to get this...

Scott: Good question. I can't answer it for you, but it's a good question.

Joan: We'll keep trying. We've got a few more interviews to go. Maybe Mr. Kersting will know.

Doris: I doubt it because he wasn't raised here; he came in. He's a newbie.

Joan: He's a foreigner! But he was on the school board right after consolidation.

Scott: Probably, and wasn't John Wagner on the Offerle Board and the school board at the time of the unification?

Joan: Okay, now this is something that is a newbie, that I noticed when I came. At this time, when you guys were in school, were there FFA classes?

Leona: No.

Joan: There never were FFA classes?

Doris: I remember FFA when I was in high school at Kinsley, but not at Offerle.

Joan: But they had FFA at Kinsley. And then by the time I got here, it was gone. Did they have 4H also?

Doris: Yes.

Scott: FFA wasn't when I came of age. 4H was here, as far as I know, 4H was always here.

Joan: When I came here to teach, it amazed me that there was no FFA in this rural area.

Rosetta: It's a touchy subject.

Joan: Well, I need to do an interview on that so I can get the scoop.

Doris: I was in 4H, but FFA first. At that time, I don't think they let girls in.

Joan: Probably not!

Leona: I thought it would be interesting to have Scott in FFA. I inquired around, well, we'd have to go to Greensburg or somewhere else to get him into FFA.

Rosetta: I don't know, she might have something to do with the fewer farm kids, but it was a board decision, and the public was not notified until, now this is how I remember it, until they were told there would be no FFA next year. And people were not happy.

Joan: I can imagine.

Doris: When I was in high school, a long time ago, we had FFA, very active.

Rosetta: Were you active in Kinsley?

Doris: Yes.

Joan: So in 4H, during the '50's and '60's, what animals...what did you do in 4H?

Doris: I just did sewing, cooking mostly or something like that. I could have done a bucket calf or something. I knew that if I raised a bucket calf it would kill me to have to sell it. And my dad wasn't real big on that in the beginning. Scott wasn't in 4H.

Joan: He just put you on a tractor. That was your 4H.

Doris: I didn't go to 4H by the time he came along. I don't think there was a little kids 4H by the time he came. We had Trenton workers or *something*...

Scott: I was never in 4H. Could have been, I suppose. He told me, he said, "Yeah, but us boys would want to be...more farm oriented or whatever. But I didn't want to take that on. Of course, Dad was sick by that time; he wasn't feeling so good.

Joan: Doris and Scott stayed here in Edwards County, is Wayne?

Doris: He's in Kansas City.

Joan: He's in Kansas City. What did he end up doing?

Doris: He's a computer geek (nerd). I've left, I didn't live here for quite a few years, 15 or 20 years.

Joan: So you've come back.

Doris: We went to Seattle.

Joan: Seattle! That's quite a change.

Doris: My husband went to Texas to go to Bible college. And then we moved back here, and then he went out to Garden City to be an associate pastor, and then we went up to the Seattle area.

Joan: And now you've come back to stay?

Doris: As far as I know.

Joan: That's pretty good to have two out of three stay around here. In our interviews we find out a lot of people, none of their kids stayed. You know, except the farm, sometimes they stay.

Leona: Scott's been here except when he went to college for 2 years.

Joan: This is our curiosity, you know we had some questions about the minorities in Offerle, like the Hispanics. Railroad workers?

Doris: Didn't Lupe work out here for a while?

Leona: Yes, they did. Lupe Roche. We had a pair of workers lived in a shack, barracks. They lived down there.

Joan: Were they cement block?

Leona: Yes. But I don't know whatever happened to them. They just disappeared.

Joan: At some point the railroad didn't need so many people, I imagine. But you don't know when that was that they would have left?

Scott: She just told me, she's talking down on the corner by the Co-op and the elevator. I have no memory of anybody living down there.

Leona: The only person that I remember, a foreigner really, is the one that worked for my grandfather at the lumberyard. He was a Russian. He was a U.S. citizen, but he had run away from Russia.

Joan: What year would that have been?

Leona: Well I don't know. He was always here as far as I remember.

Joan: But this you said was your dad?

Leona: My grandfather.

Joan: So about what year are we talking? This is back when you were a child.

Leona: Yes. And he worked for a long time for my grandfather.

Joan: He was just a bachelor?

Leona: No, he had a family.

Rosetta: Do you remember his name?

Leona: Snyder, Nick Snyder. He had children; they went to school here. There were Art, Lawrence, Paul and Rosie (she married a man from Burdett).

Joan: And he was naturalized, so he spoke with an accent.

Leona: Yes, but he couldn't write.

Joan: Was his wife Russian also? Or he met her over here?

Leona: Not Russian. She was from Spearville.

Rosetta: So any of the Hispanics like Lupe would have gone to public school? Or did she go to parochial school?

Leona: Yes, she went to public school. We had both those schools at the time and she went here. She was one of my best friends. She came from a good family.

Joan: What did her father do?

Leona: He worked on the railroad.

Joan: So he was one of the...

Rosetta: She would have been the only Hispanic child in school?

Leona: Yes. There was one other, the Perez family. And he was the head honcho for all the Mexicans around here.

Joan: On the railroad?

Leona: They rented a house right north of the railroad right up here. And then they moved to Bellefont. And they lived out there for quite a while. I don't know whatever happened to them.

Rosetta: The reason that we know the foreman's house is because we have a picture of it. We couldn't identify it. Of course, I didn't know about the how the highway changed Offerle when it was moved.

They had to move that house. I'm not sure what else they moved, but I know they had to move that foreman's house to build the highway.

Leona: Well there was an old filling station. They moved that too. And then there was a nice filling station on west down there.

Rosetta: The road turned back west?

Leona: Yes. They tore that down and moved it out here where the country store is now.

Scott: Wasn't there an old barn somewhere that they took down? We were talking about that, Pollok was involved in it. They tore it down, and that's all I know about it.

Joan: They were straightening the highway, right? (1948)

Rosetta: I don't think so.

Joan: Do you remember, about?

Leona: I don't remember when. I remember them doing it, but...

Scott: Do you know when the Catholic school was started?

Rosetta: Bea Coats might know.

Rosetta: Well we have the picture, it was the school and the nunnery together, and then when the Catholic grew, they built the new school. But Bea went to school at the Catholic school.

Leona: I'm sure she did because she's younger than I am. I don't know how much, but she's younger.

Joan: If we had our notes here, we could tell you. Well, there's been a lot of changes in Offerle, as far as loss of businesses and loss of population.

Leona: Yes, we lost the grocery store, lost the pharmacy.

Joan: What brought about those losses, do you think?

Leona: People just moved away. Of course some of them died.

Joan: Did the younger generation move away? Is that it? For jobs?

Leona: I'm sure.

Doris: People quit having as many kids.

Leona: No.

Doris: Where the pharmacy was, where the café is now, there was a whole row of buildings from there to almost the Country Store. And in one night, it was a winter night, somehow it caught on fire and they

couldn't get the fire engine started. So that whole row burned, about the only thing they saved is where the café is.

Joan: Do you know what year about?

Doris: Late '50's, early '60's. (*In 1961*)

Joan: So that wiped out that whole row of businesses and then they weren't rebuilt.

Doris: They weren't rebuilt, other than the café. I think the Riggs had the café before it burned down, and then they moved to the corner, called the Oliphant Building.

Rosetta: Which one is the (Wilbur O.) Oliphant Building?

Doris: Where the café is now.

Rosetta: That's the Oliphant Building.

Leona: One of them. They had an Oliphant Building that was for the storage, about two or three rows down. It had a great big plate glass window in it. I remember one of the grandsons were here, Miller or something, he threw something and of course it went through that window.

Rosetta: And you say they had a storage building. Which way are we going from like the café?

Leona: We had the café, and then the pharmacy. The café was the Oliphant building at that time. Then you had this little café, then this big Oliphant storage, then the beer joint, and then the barbershop and the creamery. The filling station was across the alley.

Rosetta: So all of those were in that row of buildings?

Leona: If we went to the café, they've got a picture of all those buildings there.

Joan: They do! Note: Stop at the Café and borrow the picture.

Doris: They're not open today. We'll just happened to see it in the last few days. I've never noticed it before.

Joan: Maybe they just put it up.

Scott: What all was south of the tracks?

Leona: Well, the bank, Basgall's store, and then Ed Swartz' father had a little building. He sold a few farm implements. I don't think he did much, I don't know why he was always there. And then on the other side there was the elevator. On the east side there was the elevator and on the northwest side I think there was a vacant spot, and then Sams' Mortuary, the post office and the lumber yard.

Scott: The grocery store.

Leona: The grocery store was on the other side of the street.

Scott: What was that little building that was...Novack's Shop? Growing up there was a little building

right there. What was that?

Leona: I think it was just a building.

Doris: At one time I think they must...I remember them talking about selling cream there too.

Leona: The creamery was a little wooden building right across the street from Novack. I don't know. I can't picture it right now.

Rosetta: The Novack was here, and this was the lumberyard?

Scott: Yes, right across the road west.

Doris: Somewhere on past where they have the store there was a blacksmith's shop?

Leona: Yes, there was a blacksmith's shop in there, where the store was. (*South of the Erickson store*)

Joan: How long was the blacksmith's shop there?

Leona: A long time. John Loibl, he run the blacksmith shop. I went right by it every time I went uptown. It was just a shack about to fall down at any time.

Joan: Are we talking into the '50's, '60's?

Leona: Before that.

Joan: In the 40's.

Rosetta: Do you have pictures of your grocery store?

Leona: I doubt it.

Doris: Maybe we need to dig out all the old pictures from my grandmother, there slides too.

Joan: Slides probably are still good, and they can be digitized. Because I just did some of mine, and it's great fun to do it.

Leona: Clean out the garage.

Rosetta: He has to go to the ballgames.

Leona: He drives the bus now.

Joan: They used to let the kids drive the bus. I don't think Chris ever did that, but a few of his classmates did.

Scott: Not on an official basis, I don't think they did.

Joan: We interviewed Mr. Olson who drove the bus when he was a junior. He was a bus driver on the route. Bill Olson. When he was a junior and senior, he was a bus driver (*in Kinsley*).

Scott: The kids took 'em around, then went to school.

Joan: He got his license, and I think he said just right after that he became the bus driver. He had to go get his commercial license, or whatever it is. Then he became the bus driver. He said he didn't have any problem.

Leona: He was pretty responsible.

Joan: Yes, I think we got that from the interview. So, let's see. When did your husband pass away?

Leona: 1991.

Joan: So you were married 49 years? Not quite 50 years. Any highlights of your life since the 1960's? the 1970's on up? Besides losing your husband? Any other special things?

Leona: The grandchildren.

Joan: How many grandchildren do you have?

Leona: My one great-grandchild.

Doris: You've got three grandchildren, and four great-grandchildren.

Joan: That's an accomplishment! How do you think living in Edwards County affected your life.

Leona: I wouldn't want to live anywhere else.

Joan: Why not.

Leona: I love it here.

Joan: Why?

Leona: Because it is peaceful. We don't have much crime here. I grew up here. I was born here. This is just my home. The only time I left was when I went to college, and I came right back home.

Joan: Did you miss it when you were away at college?

Leona: Oh yes.

Joan: A little bit homesick?

Leona: Yes.

Joan: But you stuck it out.

Leona: My folks wouldn't have let me come home. I had to go to college.

Joan: Did they go to college?

Leona: My mother did. My father did one year. My mother had a degree.

Joan: What was her degree in?

Leona: I suppose education. She graduated from Southwestern.

Joan: Did she ever teach then?

Leona: She came here to teach.

Joan: Well, the population has continued to decrease over the years. What do you see for the future of Edwards County? Or more specifically for Offerle?

Leona: Well, we've had some people move in. Of course, they moved in from California. They're Spanish people, but people.

Rosetta: Will it be a bedroom community for Dodge City, do you think?

Leona: Probably.

Joan: Are there a lot of people now that live here and work in Dodge or outside?

Leona: Quite a few.

Rosetta: I remember Pearl Erickson. She made beautiful quilts. Do you quilt?

Leona: No. She taught me to knit. I did some quilting, but I couldn't quilt like she did.

Joan: What else would you like to tell us that you want on this tape? This is your opportunity to...

Leona: Well, I'm just proud of my children and I appreciate them and Scott and Doris especially take care of me now so I can live by myself. I appreciate that.

Joan: That's important.

Leona: Scott does the farming.

Joan: Does it look like the farm will be able to stay viable?

Leona: I think so.

Doris: Of course, there is Aunt Ruth, she has no children, out at Bellefont. I think he will; I don't know about after he's gone. Of course, he doesn't have any children or anything. I don't know what will happen.

Rosetta: So this is the farmhouse that we were talking about across the road? I mean, how much land? That picture up there?

Leona: That picture goes over to the oil road over there, and then there's 100 and some acres where the irrigation is. That's ours, also.

Rosetta: How long has it been in the family then?

Leona: It depends on what you're talking about.

Rosetta: Ericksons right? They were there first.

Leona: Ericksons had, well, I was telling Doris, Grandpa Lawrence Erickson, he bought the lumberyard, and then there was some ground that my father owned.

Joan: But your grandfather bought the first ground that was farmed? Or your father?

Leona: My grandfather.

Joan: Then they came, I don't think we set a year. Do you know what year they came here?

Leona: I have no idea.

Doris: Well, where my great-great-grandparents lived, I live in that house now. They died in '20 and '21. They had already lived in that house, so it is older than that. It was built in probably the late teens maybe. I don't know, but I think they moved here from north of Kinsley to be close to him because he had the store. So I suppose early 1900's.

Leona: See, my Uncle Russell had polio also, and he walked with two canes, crutches. He had braces on his legs, and he farmed too. But he had a half-section way down south by the river, and he farmed that. And he had this.

Joan: So it's been nearly a hundred years.

Doris: I'm sure.

Joan: And Erickson, is that a Swedish name?

Leona: Yes.

Joan: So were you living with the rest of the Swedes there? Your ancestors north of Kinsley, there were quite a few.

Leona: Well, my great grandparents did. (They lived north of Kinsley)

Joan: That's what I meant. Her people were there, and Olson and...

Doris: I've wondered about that.

Rosetta: There were the Carlsons, the Lundstroms and the... but there were several. And they went into Garfield mostly because it was closer. Olsons didn't, but then they're Norwegians. But there was a Scandinavian area north, and it was actually part of Pawnee County.

Leona: What was your maiden name?

Rosetta: Nystrom.

Leona: When we farmed that ground north of Kinsley, she farmed it for a while...

Rosetta: Would the Ericksons have gone to church in Garfield?

Leona: I don't know.

Rosetta: My family did. They were Lutheran. I think there were some Lutherans in there. They helped start the church.

Leona: I never knew here where they went to church.

Rosetta: I was just curious. Do you have baptismal records or anything like that?

Leona: No, I don't even know what happened to all that stuff.

Joan: Now, this would be your grandparents?

Leona: Yes.

Joan: And you remember them?

Leona: Yes.

Joan: So they were living when you were a child.

Leona: I remember my great-grandparents going to live in the house where she lives today. My grandparents I do.

Joan: Do you have any Swedish traditions that still last in your family? Christmas cookies or something like that?

Leona: We always had baked potatoes with sour cream on them, and Mom always said that was a Swedish thing. That's what we always had, and that's about the only thing I remember that was Swedish.

Doris: That and my Grandpa Erickson really liked his coffee. Strong coffee.

Joan: That about wraps it up.

Rosetta: Any pictures you can find?

Doris: I'll see what I can find. How soon do you need some?

Joan: Any time, and pictures that illustrate her life, and your family when you were young even if they embarrass you. If you have a wedding picture, or something close to the wedding and that sort of thing. A picture of the farmstead if you have it. And then pictures of Offerle. Sometimes like with Bea Coates, she gave us pictures she took of the parade, but in the background of the parade were these buildings, so sometimes we look beyond the people on the horse, and it gives us pictures of how things were back then.

Leona: If you can get into the café...

Joan: We will try that.

Leona: There's a big framed picture, and it is stuffed in underneath it.

Joan: It's just a little one in with it.

Doris: By the table on the north side. It's too bad they're closed today, they close on Wednesday.

Joan: I'm going to shut this off, unless you can think of anything you want people to remember about you.

Leona: Well, I played piano for church for 10 or 12 years.

Joan: And you played piano, not the organ?

Leona: Later I played the organ some, but I played the piano.

Joan: How big is your congregation now?

Leona: Well, we just moved the church.

Doris: She doesn't go to the Methodist Church, she goes to the Baptist.

Joan: So there are three churches in town now?

Doris: No, she goes to Kinsley.

Joan: So there is the Methodist Church and the Catholic Church, the same for all these years.

Leona: Yes. The Catholic Church blew down. They had to redo that.

Scott: So did the Methodist Church, a little before my time.

Rosetta: It looks old now.

Doris: The very first building blew away in a cyclone.

Joan: Was that 1912?

Doris: Probably, and they rebuilt it and it burned down on Christmas Eve.

Joan: Somebody knocked a candle over.

Scott: Probably.

Leona: I can remember when they set up...we were in Winfield with my grandparents. We were all there, and they sent us a telegram from Lewis to tell us that the church had burned.

Joan: How old were you, about?

Leona: Oh, probably 11 or 12.

Joan: So 1936 or '37, somewhere in there.

Doris: I remember my father said that his family attended this church also, and they came in for the Christmas Eve service because evidently they hadn't heard. They were in a car and pulled up there, and

no church! It wasn't even still burning or smoldering or anything, because it was dark.

Joan: That would be quite a shock.

Leona: I remember we got two altar chairs that this older lady, Mrs. Sams, she pushed those out and saved those, and I think they saved the altar, the pulpit too.